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ABSTRACT

The minority population in North Dakota is very small, less than five percent. Most of the students at Valley City State University (VCSU) are white and from middle class families; only about eight percent of the student body represent diverse cultures. Public schools in the state also have a low enrollment of minority students. Although these conditions make it difficult to provide preservice teachers field experiences in culturally diverse classrooms, VCSU has a program for preparing teachers for success in multicultural classrooms. The program is divided into two basic parts: The first is designed to help students gain a better understanding and appreciation of the country's cultural heritage; the second part provides field experiences in culturally diverse classrooms. Current components of the multicultural education program include a required course on North Dakota Indians, special courses in Japanese culture and various American Indian cultures, and some multicultural content in astronomy, geology, art, and music courses. Proposals include creation of a university committee to plan a minimum of one seminar each semester devoted to increasing understanding and appreciation of the various cultural groups in the United States, a foreign film program, and videotapes from recent VCSU graduates who teach in culturally diverse classrooms. Current field experiences include placements in culturally diverse elementary schools, and bilingual education and English as a second language classes and programs; a student exchange program with a university in LaPaz, Baja California Sur; and opportunities for preservice teachers to visit an Indian Reservation school to observe differences in culture and the effect of these differences upon teaching and learning. A proposal is being considered that would require every preservice teacher to complete 40 clock hours of work in multicultural classrooms before graduating from the program. (ND)

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Providing Preservice Teachers With Experiences in Multicultural Classrooms

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Teacher education programs in rural areas of the Upper Midwest face a common challenge. With the increasing cultural diversity of American society, it is vital that teacher education graduates be sufficiently prepared to teach in multicultural classrooms (Garcia, 1994). Most of the students at Valley City State University (VCSU) are white and from middle-class families. Only about 8 percent of its student body represent diverse cultures. The minority population in North Dakota is also very small, less than 5 percent. According to Zimpher (1989), most prospective teachers come from monocultural backgrounds. Over 90 percent represent the White middle-class segment of American society Some of our teacher education students possess stereotyped and prejudicial attitudes toward people who are different from them. Also, it is difficult to provide them with field experiences in culturally diverse classrooms, widely recognized as essential (Powell, Zehm, Garcia, 1996). In this paper we will describe our attempts to effectively deal with the two-dimensional problem.

The VCSU plan for preparing teachers for success in multicultural classrooms is divided into two basic parts. The first is to help students gain a better understanding and appreciation of our country's cultural heritage and, secondly, to provide field experiences in culturally diverse classrooms.

I. Multicultural Education Program

Current Program Components:

One of the objectives of our Foundation Studies states that students are to develop a consciousness of history and an understanding of the common heritage of Western Civilization, appreciating at the same time the value of human diversity in race, gender, and ethnicity. All Foundation Studies instructors strive to help students achieve the objective.

A course, North Dakota Indians and Multicultural Studies, is required for all students enrolled in teacher education. While attention is given to many minority groups, special emphasis is given to the following minorities: North Dakota Native Americans, Hispanics, and Blacks. Various teaching method courses also provide preservice teachers opportunities to learn about the effect of culture, gender, social class, and exceptionality on the learning needs and styles of students within the classroom.

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In 1990 the Division of Education & Psychology faculty decided that the multicultural education component of the teacher education program needed to be infused into the entire program. Earlier, some consideration was given to creating a new multicultural education course required of all preservice teachers. After considerable thought and discussion, this idea was rejected. The outlines of several courses include objectives related to multiculturalism. Also, all instructors keep alert for "teachable moment" opportunities to reinforce the concept that much of what we treasure in our American society is due to its rich multicultural heritage.

Valley City State University has a Cultural Diversity Task Force that was created to help recruit minorities and to promote cultural awareness on the campus. The task force has initiated several projects, such as special activities during Black History month, Native American Week, Spanish Day and offering tuition waivers to minority students. In addition to these efforts, the Student Senate has a committee responsible for planning various types of programs. Many of them deal with multicultural topics. For example, a panel discussion including students from four different cultures is planned as an all-campus program for February, 1996.

In the autumn of 1992, the astronomy class at VCSU commenced construction of a medicine wheel. The wheel works like a calendar, indicating the changing seasons based on the slant of the sun's rays on the earth's surface. The "Wheel Project" has generated interest among students to learn more about how earlier civilizations devised ways to keep track of time and seasonal changes. Recently, art, music, Native American history, and stages of the moon have been added to the activities related to the medicine wheel. Special activities are held at the medicine wheel site at each change of season. The Music Department has participated in medicine wheel activities by providing percussion groups to assist in the ceremonies marking the first day of each season. Native American drummers and dancers have also taken part in the ceremonies.

Geog 225, Introduction to Earth Science, a required course for all education majors, offers students many multicultural education opportunities. Students discuss the beliefs of other cultures concerning the makeup of the universe and view a planetarium show on the origins of astronomy. Students also create a brochure on other regions of the world and share their brochure with other members of the class. In addition, students research current conflict areas of the world and try to determine how cultural differences may have contributed to the conflict.

In art courses, students learn how artists reflect their diverse cultural backgrounds in the art they create. In studying western art, the influence of Japanese, Chinese, African, Islamic, Mexican, and Native American art is examined. Art education students are encouraged to take a multicultural approach to K-12

art curriculum development and implementation. A new art history course is currently under development which will focus upon the tribal arts of Native American, Africa, and the Pacific islands.

A new course, Introduction to Japanese Society and Culture, was offered last summer. Students were introduced to the history, language, business practices, cultural concerns, educational system, and fine arts of the Japanese people. Another new course, Culture of the Plains and Woodlands Indians, was introduced within the past year. This course includes the study of their art and music, as well as the relationship of their creative efforts to mythology, ceremony, and medicine.

Proposed Program Additions:

A University committee will soon be created with the responsibility to plan a minimum of one seminar per semester devoted to increasing understanding and appreciation of the various cultural groups found within our country. The seminars will be scheduled at convenient times to encourage attendance by students, faculty, staff, and members of the local community. Attendance by students enrolled in certain courses may be required.

A foreign film night program will commence this spring. This is a joint project of the Student Senate, the Social Science Department and the Education Department. Foreign movies will be shown once a month, usually on Thursday evenings.

Recent graduates of VCSU are teaching in many states. Plans are currently being made to have those who teach in culturally diverse classrooms create and furnish the Teacher Education Office with videotapes. Each videotape will show the teacher and students working together, as well as the teacher reflecting upon his/her experiences in the classroom. The videotapes will be shown to preservice teachers during their university classroom preparation.

II. Field Experiences in Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Current Program Components:

Preservice teachers are required to visit an Indian Reservation school to observe differences in cultures and their effect upon teaching and learning. Students also visit the cultural center on the reservation to gain deeper insight into their unique culture.

For the past two years a new Multicultural Practicum has been available to preservice teachers. This practicum can be used as a directed elective in the Elementary Education major or as an elective in

the Early Childhood minor. Students are required to work in a culturally diverse classroom for 60 hours observing and teaching lessons, thus increasing their awareness of the importance of making appropriate educational decisions based on the cultural background of the students.

During the past three years many students in the VCSU Elementary Education program located on the campus of North Dakota State University have had the opportunituy to work in an elementary school that is very culturally diverse. Approximately 50 percent of the students at Madison Elementary in Fargo, North Dakota are from minority cultures. High percentages of minority students are also found in other Fargo schools in which our preservice teachers are assigned. (The Fargo-Moorhead community has a large number of new immigrants and displaced families from Viet Nam, Cambodia, Bosnia, Turkey, and Mexico.)

Within the past two years, the Division of Communication Arts and Social Sciences has created a program designed to enable preservice teachers to qualify for the North Dakota Bilingual Education/ English As Second Language Endorsement. Besides appropriate course work, students must also work in classrooms that have English As A Second Language programs.

Valley City State University offers both a major and minor in Spanish. Elementary and secondary education students are strongly encouraged to complete either option in order to enhance their teaching abilities. To enrich the Spanish program, a cooperative multicultural learning exchange has been developed over the past several years with a university in LaPaz, Baja California Sur. The program includes annual visits by groups of VCSU faculty, students, and staff. An exchange of students and faculty between the Universidad Autonomo de Baja California and VCSU has been successfully implemented. Students from VCSU have enrolled at La Paz, while students from La Paz have attended VCSU. Future plans call for an exchange of student teachers. All students at VCSU are positively influenced by the visiting faulty and students from La Paz.

Other multicultural opportunities for our preservice teachers include working in schools on Native American reservations in North and South Dakota, and in schools located near the reservations. Several have been placed in schools in Texas and Alaska, and this semester one student teacher will be going to Argentina. The opportunities for students to experience preservice field experiences in multicultural settings has increased greatly over the past several years at Valley City State University.

Proposed Program Additions:

A new field experience was recently proposed and is being considered by the Division of Education & Psychology for adoption. Under the plan, every preservice teacher would be required to

complete a minimum of 40 clock hours working with students in multicultural settings. Information concerning the requirement would be given to students when they enroll in the Introduction to Teaching course. Time spent in various settings would need to be validated, and the 40 hours could be completed anytime prior to graduation.

Summary :

Valley City State University, located in Valley City, North Dakota, has a low enrollment of minority students. This is also true of the public schools within the state. It has been challenging to find ways to provide preservice teachers with multicultural education experiences, both in the university classroom and in field experiences. Several recent additions to the VCSU curriculum have bolstered the multicultural component. Also, a proposal is currently being considered that would require every preservice teacher to complete 40 clock hours of work in multicultural classrooms before graduating from the program.

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